Utah's Early Childhood Blueprint for Progress

"What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children."

–John Dewey, 1910

Building a Foundation to Help Utah's Children Succeed

Utah Early Childhood Council

The purpose of the Early Childhood Council (ECC) is to promote the development of early childhood systems and to facilitate collaboration among all interested parties in Utah. The ECC is working toward developing a coordinated system of comprehensive services for children in Utah (from birth through age eight) and their families. This coordinated services system will include health care, education, child care, and support systems for families.

Working Together to Support and Empower Utah Families

The ECC believes that Utah parents
1. Know what's best for their children
2. Understand they have the primary responsibility for making sure their children's needs are met
3. Are eager to optimize their children's early development
4. Want their young children to be physically and mentally healthy, socially and emotionally well-adjusted, and ready to learn when they enter school

The ECC realizes that many Utah parents must spend time away from their young children for a variety of reasons, including earning money to help support their families and pursuing educational goals. The ECC supports Utah parents in their ongoing efforts to ensure that all available early childhood systems, services, programs, and workers positively influence their children's lives.

Utah's Early Childhood Leadership Summit

In 2001, the ECC identified a need to bring state leaders, early childhood professionals, and parents together to create a strategy that would enable Utah's early childhood community to more effectively support and empower Utah families. Plans were set in motion to host the first annual Utah Early Childhood Leadership Summit. In November 2002, the Summit became a reality.

The goal of the Summit was to create a foundation on which to build a network of comprehensive, collaborative services for all children in Utah (from birth through age eight) and to provide additional support systems for their families.

Work groups at the Summit addressed issues previously identified by statewide focus groups. Using synthesized information gathered from the focus groups, they developed goals outlining Utah's plan for
1. Removing identified barriers to early childhood services
2. Strengthening collaboration within the early childhood community

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The Systems

A Coordinated Early Childhood System

Utah families benefit greatly from a variety of support systems that promote the health and development of their young children. These support systems function as a safety net, when needed, and support parents in their efforts to raise healthy and successful children. Early childhood support services for families with young children include a full range of educational, health care, child care, and social services at the state and local levels.

A coordinated early childhood system is designed to encourage the delivery of connected and accessible services to families. It also promotes community-level decision making by creating state and local partnerships. The intent is for the ECC to assist communities in building a coordinated system of supports that responds to local needs.

"Early experiences clearly affect the development of the brain. Children grow and thrive in the context of close and dependable relationships that provide love and nurturance, security, responsive interaction and encouragement for exploration."

—National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (2000)

Fast Fact

Kindergarten surveys indicate that 30-40% of children entering kindergarten have a health or developmental condition that potentially interferes with their readiness to learn.
Maternal and Child Health Bureau
Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Health (2003)

A comprehensive and collaborative early childhood system (shown below) places children and families in the center of a myriad of services and supports. Such a system is adaptive in nature and should be responsive to changes in social, cultural, and research-based practices.

Health & Well-being
Behavioral & emotional health
Care coordination
Child welfare & protection
Dental care & education
Developmental assessment
Health care & education
Medicaid/CHIP
Services for children with disabilities

Family Support
Assistance with food,
clothing, & shelter
Employment
Family literacy
Family support
Family welfare
Financial assistance
Parenting education
Respite care

Early Learning & Child Care
Child care
Child care resource & referral
Child development programs
Early intervention
Head Start
Preschools
Special education preschools

3　The Summit Goals

Goal 1

To improve the coordination of early childhood services for families and professionals who work with early childhood populations.

1. Develop an early childhood web site

2. Work toward a universal application for accessing information and early childhood services

3. Identify and support the promotion and distribution of local resource kits for families of newborns

4. Long term: Improve coordination of state and federal grants

Goal 2

To strengthen and enhance Utah's early childhood infrastructure at the state and local levels.

1. Educate early childhood professionals about current advocacy and legislative efforts

2. Promote new and support existing local interagency and early childhood councils

3. Collect child outcome information from members of the early childhood community

4. Assess needs and gaps in Utah's early childhood system

5. Long term: Create a funded, state early childhood entity (i.e., house all early childhood agencies in one location)

Goal 3

To increase awareness regarding the importance of the early childhood years.

1. Unite the early childhood community at the state and local levels to educate the public about early childhood issues

2. Educate legislators, policy makers, individuals and families, those in the private sector, and faith-based community members about early childhood issues

Goal 4
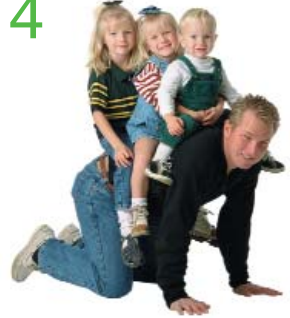
To promote increased availability and accessibility of quality early childhood services.

1. Provide support to early childhood professionals

2. Promote the utilization of preferred-practice guidelines or standards for early childhood services

3. Promote accessibility of quality early childhood services in the areas of early learning and child care, health and well-being, and family self-support

> "The time is long overdue for state and local decision makers to take bold actions to design and implement coordinated, functionally effective infrastructures to reduce the long standing fragmentation of early childhood policies and programs."
>
> —National Research Council/Institute of Medicine, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods:The Science of Early Childhood Development* (2000)

Statewide Focus Groups

The ECC conducted focus groups from June through September 2002. More than 300 individuals voiced their opinions and concerns, and offered suggestions for improvement. Participants included parents, educators, child care providers, Head Start staff, pediatricians and other health care providers, university professors, and directors and specialists in various service agencies.

Focus-group participants responded to the following questions regarding early childhood systems in Utah:
1. What is working and why?
2. What is not working and why?
3. What is your vision for early childhood in Utah?

Their responses, including specific statements, were compiled and provided to work-group participants at the Early Childhood Leadership Summit to assist the process of creating Utah's Early Childhood *Blueprint for Progress.*

Fast Fact

Utah's 2000-2001 public education expenditure per pupil was $4,475 based on fall enrollment. Compared to the national average of $7,079 per pupil, Utah ranked 51st in the nation [out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia].
Utah School Directory 2002-2003

Utah's Early Childhood Leadership Summit

More than 100 state-level policy makers and administrators, state legislators, representatives from early childhood associations and child advocacy groups, parents, corporate partners, and leaders from faith-based organizations participated in the Summit.

Utah's Early Childhood Leadership Summit included

■ A presentation about current healthy development and learning research

■ A keynote address from a national representative, Joan Lombardi, on the elements of a comprehensive early childhood system and best practices

■ Creation of a map of Utah's current early childhood services

■ Identification and review of current issues and needs facing Utah's early childhood professionals and families

■ Development of solutions and strategies to facilitate coordination of early childhood services

Implementing and Developing Outcome Measures

Equipped with a unified vision and solid information, members of the ECC will work in subcommittees to implement the *Blueprint for Progress* and to develop a monitoring system to evaluate the activities and progress of the ECC. The ECC will aid the implementation process by

1. Serving as a clearinghouse to bring together information and data relevant to the purpose of the ECC

2. Identifying a sequence of steps necessary to achieve the goals

3. Developing a means for evaluating coordinated early childhood systems development at the state and local levels

4. Responding to early childhood issues

5. Hosting periodic Early Childhood Leadership Summits to continue the work begun in Utah's Early Childhood *Blueprint for Progress*

"Early learning creates a foundation for later achievement. Efforts to help children develop to their fullest cannot be postponed until they reach age five or six."

–The Council of Chief State School Officers, *Early Learning and Family Education (1999)*

Fast Fact

"For every dollar invested in high-quality, comprehensive early care and education, society saves $7.16 in welfare, special education, and criminal justice costs."
Education Commission of the States
Starting Early, Starting Now (2001)

National Research

"Early childhood represents the period where young children attain developmental milestones that include emotional regulation and attachment, language development, and motor skills. All of these milestones can be significantly delayed or impaired when developing young children experience environmental stressors and other negative risk factors that influence the brain and seriously compromise physical, social-emotional, and cognitive growth and development."
Maternal and Child Health Bureau
Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Health (2003)

Utah has the highest percentage of children under the age of five in the nation, yet is one of only a handful of states that does not invest in any state funded prekindergarten programs for regular education.

A. Mitchell
Prekindergarten Programs in the States: Trends and Issues (2001)

"The ideal time to begin sharing books with children is during babyhood, even with children as young as six weeks. Research consistently demonstrates that the more children know about language and literacy before they arrive at school, the better equipped they are to succeed in reading."
National Research Council
Starting Out Right (1999)

Utah Early Childhood Leadership Summit Planning Committee

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